AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Cancelled)

2. (Cancelled)

3. (Original) A process for brightening and/or passivating of pickled surfaces of stainless steel, wherein the pickled surfaces are brought into contact with a process solution comprising:
   a) one or more strong acids other than the complex fluoro acids of group c),
   b) one or more oxidizing agents,
   c) one or more complex fluoro acids of elements of groups 4, 13, or 14 of the periodic table of the chemical elements and/or anions thereof in concentrations from 50 to 300 mmoles per liter.

4. (Currently Amended)) The ~~A~~ process for brightening and/or passivating of pickled surfaces of stainless steel according to claim 3 wherein the oxidizing agent b) is selected from compounds containing a peroxo-group, and which additionally comprises
   d) a hydrogen peroxide stabilizer.

5. (Currently Amended) The ~~A~~ process for brightening and/or passivating of pickled surfaces of stainless steel according to ~~at least one of claims 3 or~~ claim 4, wherein
   a) the strong acid is present in a concentration from 2 to 100 g/l, and
   b) the oxidizing agent is present in a concentration, expressed as the equivalent concentration of H_2O_2, in the range from 1 to 30 g/l.

6-15 (Cancelled)

16. (New) The process for brightening and/or passivating of pickled surfaces of stainless steel according to claim 3 wherein c) comprises one or more complex fluoro acids of Si and/or anions thereof.

17. (New) The process for brightening and/or passivating of pickled surfaces of stainless steel according to claim 16, wherein the complex fluoro acids and/or anions thereof are used in concentrations from 30 to 300 millimoles per liter.

18. (New) A process solution for pickling steel comprising:
a) one or more strong acids other than the complex fluoro acids of group c), and different from nitric acid, in a total concentration of at least 10 g/l and at most 200 g/l,
c) one or more complex fluoro acids of Si and/or anions thereof in concentrations from 50 to 500 mmoles per liter,
e) iron(III) cations in concentrations from at least 3 g/l to at most 100 g/l,
f) a total of from 0.1 to 10 g/l of chloride ions and/or hydrochloric acid,
and, optionally,
d) a hydrogen peroxide stabilizer,
the process solution containing in addition an amount of fluoride ions and/or hydrofluoric acid such that at least 1 % and up to 100 % of the iron(III) ions are present in the form of fluoride complexes, but such that the process solution contains less than 10 g/l of free fluoride ions and/or free hydrofluoric acid.

19. (New) The process solution according to claim 18 which contains no other oxidizing agent than the iron(III) ions and dissolved oxygen.

20. (New) The process solution according to claim 18 which has a redox potential, measured at process solution working temperature with a Pt/Ag/AgCl electrode, of at least 280 mV and up to 800 mV.

21. (New) The process solution according to claim 20, wherein the strong acids other than the complex fluoro acids of group c) are selected from sulfuric acid, phosphoric acid, and mixtures thereof.

22. (New) The process solution according to claim 20, wherein the process solution is in the form of a gel or a paste.

23. (New) A process for pickling steel, wherein the steel is brought into contact with a process solution according to claim 18.

24. (New) The process according to claim 23 wherein the process solution is moved relative to the surface of the steel.

25. (New) The process according to claim 23 wherein at least a fraction of the iron(II) ions formed during the pickling are oxidized to iron(III) ions.

26. (New) A process for pickling steel, wherein the steel is brought into contact with a process solution comprising:

a) one or more strong acids other than the complex fluoro acids of group c), and different from nitric acid, in a total concentration of at least 10 g/l and at most 200 g/l.

c) one or more complex fluoro acids of Si and/or anions thereof in concentrations from 50 to 500 mmoles per liter,

e) iron(III) cations in concentrations from at least 3 g/l to at most 100 g/l,

and, optionally,

d) a hydrogen peroxide stabilizer,

the process solution containing in addition an amount of fluoride ions and/or hydrofluoric acid such that at least 1 % and up to 100 % of the iron(III) ions are present in the form of fluoride complexes, but such that it contains less than 10 g/l of the total of free fluoride ions and/or free hydrofluoric acid.

27. (New) The process to claim 26 wherein the process solution contains no other oxidizing agent than the iron(III) ions and dissolved oxygen.

28. (New) The process according to claim 26 wherein the process solution additionally contains a total of from 0.1 to 10 g/l of chloride ions and/or hydrochloric acid.

29. (New) The process according to claim 26 wherein the process solution has a redox potential, measured at its working temperature with a Pt/Ag/AgCl electrode, of at least 280 mV and up to 800 mV.

30. (New) The process according to claim 26 wherein the process solution is moved relatively to the surface of the steel.

31. (New) The process according to claim 26 wherein the concentration of e) iron(III) cations is from at least 5 g/l, to at most 60 g/l and the process solution contains an amount of fluoride ions and/or hydrofluoric acid such that it contains less than 5 g/l of the total of free fluoride ions and/or free hydrofluoric acid.